

IMAM SHAWKANI

The Position of the Pious Predecessors
Regarding The Attributes of Allah



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Publisher's Note

I begin with every beautiful name that belongs to Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

All complete praise is due to Allāh alone, the *Rabb*¹ of all that exists. May blessings and greetings be upon the best of His creation Muḥammad, the last and final Messenger, and upon his family, companions and all those who follow him until the Day of Judgement.

This book is a translation of the Arabic treatise '*Al-Tuhaf Fi Madhahib Al-Salaf*' (The Treasures in the Positions of the Pious Predecessors) which is entitled in English as 'The Position of the Pious Predecessors Regarding The Attributes of Allah' is one of the *Fatwas* of Shaykh Muhammad b. Ali al-Shawkani which is in response to a question he received from Makkah regarding the *Ayat* and *Ahadith* pertaining to the Names and Attributes of Allah and the understanding of them by the *Salaf al-Salih* (righteous predecessors).

I hope that it will benefit those who have long been confused by this issue and are seeking clarification to understand it correctly.

Some beneficial footnotes compiled are marked as translator's notes [TN] to further aid the reader in understanding the Imām's intended meaning at various points as well as references to the original sources. Additionally, anything in square brackets [] are individual words that have been added in order to also aid in understanding the context.

Although every effort has been made to ensure this modern translation is as

¹ [TN] The word *Rabb* has a vast meaning. Its detailed meaning is the Sustainer, Cherisher, Master and Nourisher.

accurate as possible, I do not claim to be free from any mistakes and therefore if there are any obvious errors in the translation I will be deeply grateful to the experts of knowledge and friends to provide feedback and guidance.

I hope that this book is graceful for the reader and if so, then it is only a blessing from Allāh or it is the result of guidance of teachers and encouragement of sincere friends. I also hope that with these translations I can make a modest contribution to the right understanding and sincerely ask Allāh to accept my meagre efforts in this regard.

I ask Allāh to make this simple endeavour a source of pleasure for us all and a source of success in the Hereafter. *Āmīn*.

Abū Ubaydah Aarsalān Yūnus

Biography Imam Shawkani (1173 A.H. - 1250 A.H.)

Name

Muhammad b. Ali b. Muhammad. He was nicknamed al-Shawkani in reference to Shawkan a village located near San'a, Yemen.

His Birth And Upbringing

He was born on the 28th of *Dhul Qa'dah* 1173 Hijri. His father was one of the most prominent scholars and judges of San'a, and he first studied under his virtuous father.

Seeking Knowledge

He learnt and mastered the sciences of *Fiqh*, *Grammar*, *Usul al-Fiqh*, *Hadith* and more from the scholars of his country.

His Virtues

He was considered the reformer of the 13th century Hijri. He compiled commentaries and annotations, and studied from the most eminent scholars of his time.

There is hardly any field of Arabic and Islamic studies in which he did not excel, until his fame spread and his reputation became widespread. He assumed the position of judge in San'a, where he remained for a long time.

His Teachers

He studied under the likes of:

- Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Harazi
- Hasan b. Abdullah al-Habal
- Qasim b. Muhammad al-Khawlani
- and many more

His Students

His famous students were:

- Abdulhaq Makki
- Muhammad b. Hasan al-Shijni
- and many more

Books

He authored many works, the famous of them being

- *Nayl al-Awtar* a *Fiqh* commentary on *Al-Muntaqa Min al-Akhbar*
- *Bugyat al-Arib* which is on Arabic grammar
- *Fath al-Qadir* a commentary on the Qu'ran
- and many more

Death

He died in the month of *Jumada al-Akhirah* of the year 1250 Hijri corresponding to 1834 AD. He was buried in San'a, after living a blessed scholarly life.²

² [TN] Taken from *Taj al-Mukallal* by Shaykh Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan p.443 - 449

[The Position of the Pious Predecessors Regarding The Attributes of Allah]

(By Shaykh al-Islam, the Judge, the Great Scholar Muhammad b. Ali al-Shawkani may Allah have mercy on him)

[I begin with every beautiful name that belongs to Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful]. All complete praise is due Allah alone, *Rabb* of the Worlds, and may the blessings and greetings be upon the best of humankind [i.e. the Prophet ﷺ] and his noble family, and may Allah be pleased with his eminent companions. [And so] a question has been received from some of the people living at the Sacred City (Makkah), and this is it's wording:

Question

[I begin with every beautiful name that belongs to Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful]. All complete praise is due to Allah alone, *Rabb* of the Worlds. What do the *Fuqaha* of the religion, the scholars of *Hadith* and the people of *Tawhid* say regarding the *Ayat* of the Attributes [of Allah] of what is mentioned in the Great Book (Qur'an) and the reports about them which is made clear in the *Sunnah* of he who guides to the straight path [i.e. the Prophet ﷺ].

Is affirming them, enjoining them, and implementing them through their apparent meaning without *Takyif* [explaining the how], or [without] *Tamthil*

[likening Allah to His creation], or [without] *Ta'wil* [distorting the meaning through false interpretation], or [without] *Ta'til* [denying the apparent meaning], the creed of the people of *Tawhid*, and the [full] belief of the Clear Book (Qu'ran), and the [correct] following of the *Salaf* (righteous predecessors), or is this the doctrine of the *Mujassimah* (Anthropomorphists)?

What is the ruling on whoever distorts the meaning [through false interpretation] of the Attributes and negates what Allah described Himself with and what His Prophet ﷺ has described Allah with, and [which is] supported with texts as approved by the specific elite, that Allah *Subhanahu* [free and far from all imperfections what the deviants and disbelievers falsely attribute to Him] is above the Heavens above His Throne, separate from His Creation, and His Knowledge is everywhere [i.e. encompasses everything], and the evidence for that are the *Ayat of Istiwa*, ascension and raising.³ His saying in the Qur'an,

“Do you feel secure that He who is above...” (67:16)

and from the *Sunnah* is the *Hadith* of the slave girl⁴, the Descending⁵ [of Allah to the nearest Heaven], and of Imran b. Huṣayn⁶. As well as the saying of the Prophet ﷺ,

“Do you not trust me, when I am the trustee of the One Who is above the Heavens?...”⁷

and other than that of the abundant *Ayat* and *Mutawatir Ahadith*. The one who distorts the meaning and makes the *Ayat of Istiwa* as *Istila* [i.e. seizing with power], and distorts the meaning of Descending as Mercy, and thus he made distortion to what expels the rest of the texts on the Attributes [of Allah]. He

³ [TN] See Qur'an (20:5), (35:10) and (4:158)

⁴ [TN] *Sahih Muslim Hadith* no.537

⁵ [TN] *Sahih Bukhari* no.1145

⁶ [TN] Referring to *Sunan al-Tirmidhi Hadith* no.3483 which is *Da'if* because a narrator in the chain called Shabib is *Da'if*.

⁷ [TN] *Sahih Bukhari Hadith* no.4351

lives in the darkness of the mind and in ignorance and doubts. If it is said to him [i.e. the one who distorts], “Where is Allah?”, he responds by saying that this question should not be asked and that Allah never had a place – as is the answer of the deviant groups. So is that the answer of the *Jahmis*, the *Marisis*⁸ and the misguided people of *Kalam*? Or is that the answer of the scholars upon the *Sunnah*?

Benefit us with an answer in the sake of [earning] good deeds as,

**“On the Day when every soul will come disputing [i.e., pleading] for itself”
(16:111)**

and so, this position has endured much quarrelling, minds have been confused and [steadfast] feet have slipped, and everybody claims to be correct with ornamented answers.

So, clarify that which is requested with evidence and clarify the path of truth with lengthened details. May Allah multiply your rewards and protect you from evil, and may the peace, blessings, and mercy of Allah be upon you.

His Answer

(I say) know that the speech regarding the *Ayat* and *Ahadith* mentioning the Attributes [of Allah] have been prolonged and widely spread out, and have been embraced by the schools of thought, the methods have varied and sects have differed regarding it.

The reason for that is because the [ignorant] people who claim to have knowledge have not stopped where Allah has stopped them. They entered through doors that Allah did not permit them to enter, and due to their attempt to learn about something that Allah has made exclusive to Himself in His

⁸ [TN] *Jahmis* referring to Jahm b. Safwan who spread the deviant view of *Ta'til* that he took from Ja'd b. Darham and the *Marisis* referring to Bishr al-Marisi who was the leader of those who spread the deviant view of the Qur'an being the creation.

Knowledge. So they [i.e. these deviants] split into sects, branched out in factions and became parties, despite beginning their ways attempting to reach – what they perceived – is the optimal achievement, their aims were different and their purpose varied.

Consequently the least sinful of these sects and least punishable that burden themselves indulged into knowledge of what Allah did not command them to know from His Knowledge – is the sect that wanted to reach the truth and stand upon that which is correct, but they took a rough path and climbed a steep obstacle in discovering it whereby whosoever who took it could not return let alone reach what they truly sought.

Despite that, they set principles which they thought were true, falsely justifying them with Qur'anic *Ayat* and authentic Prophetic *Ahadith*, and they based this false justification on flimsy doubts and delusional fantasises. Thus they are two sects:

1. The first sect that went to extremities in exoneration. So they reached a point that makes the skin get goosebumps and the heart tremble. That is due to their *Ta'til* (denying the apparent meaning) of the established Attributes in the Book (Qur'an) and *Sunnah*. An establishment that is more evident than the Sun during the day, and more apparent than the break of dawn. They thought what they have done was in conformity with the truth and in accordance to what Allah wants. Consequently, they have deviated from the straight path, and misguided those who desired and sought to follow the straight path.
2. The second sect that went to such high extremes in affirming the ability [of Allah] to the point that it has no influence or consideration to anything other than itself. This has led to absolute *Jabr* [compulsion that one is forced to do the actions and has no freewill] and total coercion⁹ so that sending Messengers and Revealing Books [and Scriptures] has no benefit nor does it bring any benefit to His servants and they have come up with distortions and false interpretations of the clear *Ayat*, as well as

⁹ [TN] Imam Ibn al-Qayim has authored a great book refuting this notion entitled *Shifa al-Alil*

[created] compromises of the clear proofs of Allah. So they were like the first sect in misguidance and misguiding, despite that both objectives were correct and the intention was clear¹⁰. Had it not been for the ugly extremes [and exaggerations] that disfigured it and that another sect took a middle course and sought to combine between a Lizard and a Whale (i.e. two extremes) believing they had reached a point between excess and deficiency. Then each of these three sects started to argue, dispute, investigate and scrutinise their claims, attacking the other and attacking what they had acquired that agreed with their own views, **“...Every faction rejoicing in what it has.” (30:32)**. Before Allah, the opponents shall meet. Despite this, they all agree among themselves that the path of the *Salaf* is the safest. However, they have claimed that the path of the *Khalaf* [those whom came after them] is more knowledgeable. So, the ultimate achievement regarding their alleged knowledge they attained though the path of the *Khalaf* was that they and their [so called] intellectuals wished to have the religiosity of [the ignorant] old women and they said, “Congratulations to the laypeople!”¹¹

Thus, the realisation of this alleged knowledge is such that those who achieve it can congratulate the simple-minded ignorant layperson, wishing to be among their ranks, following their [level of] religiosity and walking in their footsteps. Indeed, this person calls out loudly and demonstrates the clearest evidence that this alleged knowledge that they have sought – that ignorance is far better than it. So, what do you think of an alleged knowledge whose possessor admits to himself that ignorance is better than it and when reaching its peak and achieves its end goal, it renders him ignorant of it and not acting upon it.

In this there is a lesson for those who take heed, and a clear sign for those

¹⁰ [TN] Good intentions do not justify evil deeds. Abdullah b. Mas'ud (*Radiu Allahu Anhu*) mentioned something similar where he said, “How many who desire good never attain it.” *Sunan al-Darimi* vol.1, p.68

¹¹ [TN] See *Dar Ta'arud al-Aql Wa al-Naql* by Imam Ibn Taymiyah vol.1, p.160

who observe. Why did not they work towards the ignorance of these matters in which they entered initially, and be saved from its consequences, relieving themselves from its fatigue? They should have said what the poet said:

*I see that the matter leads to an end
Turns out that the end becomes a [new] beginning*

They would have gained pure freedom from this wish and safety from this congratulation for the laypeople. Indeed, a wise person does not wish for a rank similar to his own or lower than his own, nor does he congratulate someone who is lower than him or similar to him. This can only be the case for someone whose rank is higher than his own and whose position is higher than his own.

O Allah! How amazing it is that simple ignorance is considered higher in rank and better in value for someone compared to knowledge? Have listeners ever heard something similar to this strange [statement], or have transmitters reported anything like it or resembles it!?

If the condition of this sect that we have introduced to you is the lightest and the least consequential, what do you think about the other sects in whose corruption of objectives has become apparent, and their sources and origins have been proven invalid? Like the sects that intend, through the manifestations they show, to plot against Islam and its people, and strive to create doubt in it by introducing doubts and determining matters that lead to defamation of the religion and turning its people away from it!

At this point, you should know that,

*The best matters are those of the Salaf who are based upon guidance,
And the worst matters are the newly invented innovations [in the religion]*

The truth that has no doubt or ambiguity is what the best generations were upon, then those who followed them, then those who followed them.¹² They –

¹² [TN] Sahih Bukhari Hadith no.6429

may Allah have mercy on them and guide us to emulate them and seek guidance from their guidance – used to accept the proofs of the Attributes of Allah per their apparent meanings, and not indulge in what they did not know, nor did they distort.

This is known from their sayings and actions that are established from their schools of thought, no one doubts it, neither sceptics nor deniers, and no argumentative person argues about it. Even if a divisive person or a shining figure emerges among them, they clarify his matter to people and inform them that he is on the wrong path. They openly declare this in gatherings and forums, warning people against his innovations, just as they did when Ma’bad Al-Juhani and his companions appeared, stating that the matter resumed without being preceded by predestination, and they explained his deviation and the falsehood of his statements to the people, so, they warned them against him – except those whom Allah has sealed their hearts and has placed a covering upon their vision.

Thus, those who came after them became a pattern to clarify to the people the falsehood of the statements of the people of deviance, and warned against them, as the *Tabi’un* [i.e., Successors of the Companions] (may Allah have mercy on them), did with Al-Ja’d b. Darham and those who said what he said and adopted his false dogma.

They continued to do so, thus the innovator in regards to the Attributes cannot openly show his innovation, rather they concealed it just as the *Zanadiqah* [i.e., disbelieving heretics] conceal their *Kufr*. So it is with all the other innovators in religion despite the variance in their innovations and the uttered falsehood.

However here, we limit to talking about the issue that the question was concerning, which is the issue of Attributes, and what was falsely spoken about it by those who spoke without the right of knowledge – unless Allah granted them permission to know – and that passing on the proofs of the Attributes based on its apparent meaning is the creed and methodology of the pious predecessors, including the companions, their successors (*Tabi’in*) and those who followed them, and that whosoever wanted [to show] the extremists’ disputes, the scum of the innovators and distorters regarding what

contradicts the apparent meaning, they – the *Salaf* – would rise against them and warned people about them, clarifying to them that it is contrary to what the [correct] people of Islam are upon and all other innovators in Attributes who utter statements that contradict what the overwhelming majority of the companions, successors and those who followed them are in the secret areas and corners, and they are never sought [for contact] except by only an arrogantly selfish person, and no one is deluded by their decorated words except a deceived one.

Despite this, they are in fear of the people of Islam and are anticipating that an adversity will descend upon them from the protectors of the religion; the guiding scholars, the rulers, and the sultans; until a star of calamity and a lightning of evil that strikes comes from the Abbasid side, and those whom they have from the greatest authority in commanding, prohibiting, issuing, and attacking, and that is in the Abbasid state because of its judge, Ahmad b. Abi Du'ad. It was there and then that the people who cowered and lowered their heads in those corners raised their heads and he set off against what had been silenced of their tongues, and they announced their false doctrines and misguided innovations. They called people to them and argued about them and resisted those who opposed them, even with innovations until good was mixed with evil, and the public became confused between truth and falsehood, and the *Sunnah* with innovation.

Since Allah has undertaken the care to make His Religion superior over all religions and to preserve it from distortion, alteration and replacement, He has originated scholars of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* in every era who will explain to people their Religion and denounce upon the people of innovation their innovations. Praise be to Allah, they had praiseworthy positions and recognised actions in giving victory to the Religion and the unveiling of covers of the innovators.

With these few words that we mentioned, you know that the creed of the *Salaf* the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, the *Tabi'in* [their followers], and those who followed them, is to reach the proofs of the Attributes in their apparent form without distorting them or without wrong interpretation of any of them, without likening them to something, or rejecting them that leads

to the most wrong interpretations.

Whenever a questioner asked about any of the Attributes, they recited the evidence for them and refrained from further discussion [and hearsay], and said, “Allah said it like this, and we do not know anything other than that, and we do not do *Takaluf* [i.e., to go beyond the *Shari’ah* and do or say what was never legislated], or speak about what we do not know nor of what Allah has not given us permission to go beyond”.

If the questioner wanted to gain more from them than what is apparent, they would warn him from delving into what does not concern him and forbid him from seeking what cannot be achieved except by falling into an innovation that is different from what they are upon and from what they have memorised from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and from what the *Tabi’in* have memorised from the Companions and what those who came after them memorised from the *Tabi’in*.

In these virtuous centuries, the belief regarding the Attributes was unified, and the methodology for all of them was consistent, and their preoccupation was with what Allah commanded them to be preoccupied with and with what He assigned them to carry out His obligations of the belief in Allah, establishing prayer, paying Zakat, fasting, performing Hajj, Jihad, spending money in all ways of charitable work and obedience, seeking useful knowledge, and guiding people to all types of goodness, as well as being steadfast upon the requirements that lead to attaining Paradise and being saved from Hell, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and refraining the hand of the oppressor according to one’s capacity reaches and one’s ability. They did not preoccupy themselves with anything other than that, which Allah did not charge them with knowledge of, and their worship was not dependent on understanding its truth. So, the religion at that time was pure from the chaos of innovations, clean from the impurities of the sectarianism’s filthiness. The Companions, the *Tabi’in*, and their successors followed this pattern. They were guided by the guidance of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and they followed the example of his actions and words. Whosoever says that they [i.e., the *Salaf*] have fallen into the errors of adopting any of these emerging doctrines regarding the Attributes or in other things, then he has committed a great

slander against them, and it is not acceptable to do so,. For the sayings of the Imams who are familiar with their conditions and who also know them from trustworthy, reliable people with proof refute them directly to their faces, and everyone who is learned knows that and every knowledgeable person as well. So, hold on to this tightly and know that it is the doctrine of the best generation [i.e., the Companions], then of those who succeeded them [*Tabi'in*], then of those who follow them, then of those who follow them all.

Leave behind what has occurred of these doctrinal deviations regarding the Attributes of Allah, and relieve yourself of those expressions that the deviants and philosophers came up with, made it the standard, and made it a principle that rejects the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger ﷺ. For if they agree with them, then it is because they have agreed with a principle they have established in their claim, and if they contradict them, then they contradict their claimed principles. They consider whatever agrees with them to be of the accepted and decisive, and that what contradicts it is from the rejected and ambiguous category – even if you brought a thousand *Ayat* with explicit proof and clear in apparent meaning, or a thousand *Ahadith* that were proven to be *Sahih*, they would not care about it nor would they raise their heads to it [i.e., have interest to it], nor would they consider it anything at all. Whoever denies this should read the books on these sects classified in the science of *Kalam*, for he will come to know the truth and accept this statement without hesitation.

From the strange wonders and odd news that these innovated principles and expressions which were issued from the people of *Kalam* that has been made as [creedal] principles by those after them, have no basis other than the mere claim of reason and a transgression on the natural innate disposition. Each one of their members has had their minds dispute over it and their understandings differed at it. So this one says the rule of reason in this speech is such and such, while that one says the rule of reason in this same situation is such and such. Then after them comes he who makes that which he understands as the one whom he imitates and emulates as a fundamental principle and a source to return to and a standard for the Words of Allah and the words of His Messenger ﷺ, accepting from them what agrees with him and rejecting from them what contradicts him.

O what a transgression this is against Allah, the Muslims and scholars of Islam by these most horrific calamities the likes of which Islam and its people have never been afflicted with.

What is more stranger than this, more astonishing, more hideous, and more horrific is that after they made these alleged rationalities that they inferred, despite their differences in them and contradictions in them as foundations to which the evidence of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* would go back to, they made them a standard for the Attributes of The Almighty *Rabb*. So, what this deviant person alleges and understands of Attributes is done with certainty, and whatever his opponent understood, he asserts with. Thus they affirmed for Allah The Exalted a thing and its opposite, based on what their corrupt minds decided and which they contradicted regarding it. They did not pay attention to what Allah described Himself with or His Messenger ﷺ described. Rather, if they found it to be consistent with what they reasoned, they made it supportive and strengthen it, and they say that 'The evidence of hearing was presented in agreement with the evidence of reason'. However if they found it to be contrary to what they reasoned, they made it contradictory to the original principle, ambiguous and not intelligible in meaning or apparent significance.

Then the one who disagreed with them confronted them with the opposite of their statement. So his reason was contrary to what his opponent reasoned, and made that a basis that brought back to him the evidence of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, and he made what was ambiguous according to those people as decisive according to him, and what differed from the evidence they had as agreeable to it according to him. The conclusion of these people was that they knew of the attributes of Allah what He did not know, and this is sufficient for you and there is nothing beyond it. For him the pen changes out of shame before Allah The Most High the Most Great.

Perhaps someone may have ruled this out, and some denounced it and said that what I have said is an exaggeration, overstatement, vulgarity, and exorbitance, and that the matter is simpler than having its outcome as such and its fruit be like this fruit that I have referred to.

So I say, take the summary of the calamity, leave its details and listen to what makes you hear [well]. Had it not been for this persistence on your part,

you would not have heard it, nor would the pen have run through anything like it. This is Abu Ali¹³, and he is one of their leaders and one of their pillars. The seniors have spoken about him – and the last person to have said that about him was the author of the commentary of *Al-Qala'id* – ('By Allah! He [Allah] does not know about Himself except what he knows'). So take this explicit statement as you are not satisfied with that allusion, and look at this transgressive audacity against Allah Almighty, after which there is no greater audacity. Woe to the mother of Abu Ali! Is there a bray like his? For he had entered himself into this strait. So, have the listeners heard of an oath more deviant than this cursed oath? Or have the transmitters conveyed a word that is close in meaning to his tribulation causing statements? Or has a proud person reached the same level as this self-deluded, boastful person? Or has someone who is immoral in his oaths reached something close to his immorality?

Every sane person knows that if one of us swore that his son or father knew nothing of himself except what he himself knew, he would be lying in his oath and committing a sin in it, because every individual human contains qualities and instincts that he does not like for anyone else to know about and hates for others to know about them. Who knows what is going on through someone else's mind and what is hidden in his conscience? Whoever claims to know this and that he knows from other humans what that other person knows about himself, and that other person does not know about himself except what this claimant knows, then he is either mentally ill, raving about what he does not know and speaking about what he does not understand, or he is a severe liar and a great slanderer. This is something that no one knows except Allah, Glory be to Him, for He is the one who comes between a person and his heart and knows what his soul whispers to him and what pleases his servants and what they declare, what they reveal and what they conceal, as He told us about that in His Mighty Book in more than one place.

Whoever proves to himself knowledge that only Allah knows among His servants has been disappointed and lost. What do you think of someone who goes beyond this and transgresses and swears by Allah Almighty that Allah

¹³ [TN] He was one of the leaders of the *Mu'tazilah*.

does not know of Himself except what he knows? Is it not right for us to hold him to be mentally disturbed, for if he were insane, he would not be a leader whose words would be followed by groups of people of his time and those who came after him, who would quote his words in notebooks and narrate from him in places of disagreement. Perhaps the followers of this and those who imitate his doctrine, if someone said to them and cited to them the source of the words of Allah,

“and they do not encompass any knowledge of Him” (20:110)

and His saying,

**“and they do not encompass any of His knowledge except what He wills”
(2:255)**

and said to them, this refutes what your friend said and indicates that this oath of his is an immoral and fabricated one. They would have said this and something similar, which indicates its meaning and gives its meaning from the similarity mentioned in contradiction to the evidence of reason, which is rejected by the established principles. In short, lengthening the details of speech in such a situation is a waste of time and preoccupation with telling woeful myths, which bring tears not laughter. Our intention here is only to guide the questioner to the fact that the true doctrine regarding the Attributes is to accept them as they appear without interpretation, distortion, affectation, arbitrariness, force, likening, or nullification, and that this is the doctrine of the righteous *Salaf* from the Companions, the *Tabi'in*, and their followers.

So if you say: What do you mean by denial of such phrases that you repeat? The people of the Islamic schools of thought turn away from this and avoid it, and we do not believe its meaning and its meaning is not found except in a group of infidels, and they are those who deny the Creator!

I say: Oh individual! If you are one of those who are familiar with the science of *Kalam*, which has been agreed upon by sects of the people of Islam, then you will inevitably have seen what many of them say, mention in their writings

and narrate from their elders. Indeed Allah Glory be to Him, is transcendent and sanctified, is neither a body nor a substance nor an accident nor inside or outside of the World.

So I adjure you by Allah which statement is equivalent to this expression of negation? What exaggeration in evidence of this denial can take the place of this exaggeration? So these people were fleeing from the suspicion of likening to this denial, like the [proverb of] one who [flees from something only to fall into something worse and] said,

*So I was like one who runs to a surface from which water gushes forth
Seeking safety from the paths of thunder*

or similar to

one seeking refuge from the burning heat of the ground by going into the fire

fleeing from the sting of a wasp to the sting of a snake

fleeing from the sting of an ant to the bite of a lion!¹⁴

These and similar idle talkers like them from the *Mutakalimin* and *Mutakalifin* may be satisfied with two words from the Book of Allah the most High with which He described Himself and revealed them to His Messenger, and they are,

“And they do not encompass Him in knowledge” (19:110)

and

¹⁴ [TN] These proverbs are used to describe someone who turns from something difficult, dangerous, or otherwise to something worse. They are used to describe someone who turns to something they think is easier than the first one, and that it is a suitable alternative, only to find themselves in a more serious situation.

“There is nothing like Him.” (42:11)

These two words contain the decisive statement and include what helps those of understanding who are walking in those paths. So the word from it clearly evidences that everything that humans speak about Allah’s Essence and Attributes in the form of scrutiny and claims of investigation is tainted with a branch of ignorance, mixed with mixtures that are incompatible with knowledge and contradictory to it. Allah Almighty has told us that they do not encompass knowledge of Him. So whoever claims that his essence is such and such, or his Attribute is such and such, then there is no doubt that the validity of that depends on encompassing His knowledge, and this knowledge has been denied for every individual.

So every statement of the people of *Kalam* comes from ignorance, either from every angle or in some respects. What comes from ignorance is added to ignorance, especially if it concerns the essence of Allah and His Attributes, for this is a risk in religion that is not the case with other matters. This is known to every person with knowledge and every person who is aware of it.

No one understood the benefit of this *Ayah*, stopped at it, and extracted from its fruits except those who passed on the Attributes on their apparent meaning, and relieved themselves of carrying out *Taklif*, interpretations, and distortions, and they are the righteous *Salaf*, as you are aware. They are the ones who admitted their lack of knowledge and stopped themselves where Allah stopped them, and said: ‘Allah knows best how He is and what His attributes are, indeed all knowledge belongs to Him’. Additionally they said, ‘Whenever someone says something, he says it. Whosoever is preoccupied with seeking this impossibility will not achieve anything other than idle talk speaking words that are neither understood nor validated.

*Knowledge belongs to the Most Merciful, the Majestic
And others who are immersed in their ignorance mumble about
What does dust have to do with knowledge, but rather...
They only strive to know that they do not know*

Indeed, many of these *Mutakalifin* admitted that they did not benefit from their *Takaluf* and lack of contentment with what the righteous *Salaf* were convinced of, except the mere confusion in which they found in other *Mutakalifin*. So he¹⁵ said,

*Indeed I visited all those institutes
and wandered among those landmarks
So I saw nothing but a confused person placing his palm
on his chin, or a regretful person knocking on his tooth of regret [hearing the
sound of the tooth of regret i.e. someone who regrets something he missed]*

Here I am telling you about myself and explaining to you what I fell into yesterday [i.e. my early days of seeking knowledge]. During my days of seeking knowledge and whilst being in the prime of youth, I occupied myself with this science which they sometimes called the science of *Kalam*, sometimes the science of *Tawhid*, and sometimes the science of the fundamentals of the religion. I delved into the writings of the various sects of them, hoping to return with a benefit and return with a gain, but I achieved nothing but disappointment and confusion from that. These were the reasons that endeared me to the doctrine of the *Salaf*, although I had previously followed that. However I wanted to increase my insight and passion for it, and I said at that time about these schools of thought,

*The most of what I achieved in my research
And from my perspective after a long contemplation
Is that pause between the two paths is better
For those who have not encountered anything knows nothing but confusion
Although I have gone through the depths and difficulties of it
And I have not satisfied myself with anything other than deep study
As for the words “**There is nothing like Him**” (42:11)
The negation of similarity in everything is derived from it*

¹⁵ [TN] Referring to al-Shahrastani in his book *Nihayatu al-Iqdam Fi Ilm al-Kalam* p.3

So this *Ayah* refutes the anthropomorphists and explains the definition of speech when describing Him, Glory be to Him, as the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, and when mentioning hearing, sight, hand, ascension, and other similar things contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Thus, affirmation of these Attributes is established, not in the manner of resemblance to or likening them to creatures. Therefore, it refutes both sides of exaggeration and negligence, which are exaggeration in affirmation leading to anthropomorphism and negation leading to denial. So from between the two sides and the exaggeration of both sides emerges the validity of the doctrine of the righteous *Salaf*, which is their statement of affirming the Attributes that He has proven for Himself in a way that only He knows, for He is the one who said,

“There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing”
(42:11)

Among the Attributes that the *Salaf* commanded to be taken on their apparent meaning and applied according to what was stated in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* without *Takaluf* or interpretation is the Attribute of *Istiwa* mentioned by the questioner. They say, ‘We affirm what Allah has affirmed for Himself regarding His *Istiwa* on His Throne in a form that only He knows and in a manner that only He knows, and we do not burden ourselves with anything other than that.’ As there is nothing like Him, neither in His essence nor in His attributes, and His servants do not encompass knowledge of Him.

This is also what they say regarding the issue of direction [of Allah being above His creation in a manner that befits His Majesty separate from His creation] mentioned by the questioner who pointed out some of the evidence for it. The evidence for this is abundant in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The scholars of knowledge, especially the scholars of *Hadith*, have compiled lengthy discussions by mentioning Qur'anic *Ayat* and authentic *Ahadith*.

From that, I came across a simple work¹⁶ in a volume compiled by the historian of Islam, Al-Hafidh Al-Dhahabi, may Allah have mercy upon him,

¹⁶ [TN] The book is entitled *Kitab al-Uluw*

in which he evidenced everything about the direction, whether from the Book, the *Sunnah*, or the words of a Companion.

The issue is too clear to be ambiguous for a knowledgeable person and too clear for it to need elaboration. However when those unrest and upheavals occurred among some Islamic sects, there was much talk about it and the issue of *Istiwa* took place for a long time, especially among the *Hanbalis* and other people from the various schools of thought. For they have had major tribulations and great battles about it and they continue to do so era after era. The truth is what we have made known to you from the doctrine of the righteous *Salaf*.

So the *Istiwa* on the Throne and the creation [looking above to the Heavens when seeking refuge] in that direction has been stated in the Noble Qur'an in many places that would take too long to list and to publish. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ has also stated it in more than one *Hadith*. Rather, this is something that every individual amongst the people finds within himself, senses in his innate nature, and is drawn to by his nature, as you see in everyone who seeks help from Allah the Most High, and seeks refuge in Him, and directs his supplications to His sublime side and invincible glory. At that point, he points with his palm or aims his eyes to the sky. This is the same when presenting the reasons for supplication, the occurrence of motives for seeking help, the existence of the necessities of inconvenience, and the emergence of reasons for seeking refuge, whether that be the learned amongst the people, the ignorant among them, and the one who follows the path of the *Salaf*. Whilst the one who follows the people of interpretation who say that *Istiwa* means domination, as the majority of interpreters and [their] leaders have said, as Ahmad b. Yahya Tha'lab, al-Zajaj, and al-Farra and others have said. Or it is a metaphor for Kingship and authority as others said.

Safety and salvation lies in making this as it appears and acknowledging that the *Istiwa* and the creation [looking above to the Heavens when seeking refuge] are as stated in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, without explaining how, nor *Takaluf*, nor gossip, nor any deficiencies in any of the statements. Whoever exceeds this amount through excess or negligent behaviour is not following the example of the *Salaf*, nor standing on the path of salvation, nor refraining

from error, nor following the path of safety and uprightness.

So just as we say this about the *Istiwa* and the creation [looking above to the Heavens when seeking refuge] in that direction, so we say in the likes of His saying,

“and He is with you wherever you are. For Allah is All-Seeing of what you do” (57:4)

and His saying,

“There is no secret conversation between three but that He is the fourth of them, nor of five but that He is the sixth of them” (58:7)

and in similar to,

“Indeed, Allah is with the patient” (2:153)

“Indeed, Allah is with those who have *Taqwa* and those who are doers of good” (16:128)

to what is similar to that, close to it, and similar to it.

So we say in *Ayat* like these: this is how the Qur'an came. Indeed, Allah the Exalted is with these people, and we do not attempt to interpret this as

others do¹⁷ that what is meant by the creation [looking above to the Heavens when seeking refuge] and Him being with them [as per the above *Ayat*] is being with them in His knowledge. For this is a branch of interpretation that contradicts the doctrines of the *Salaf* and differs with what the Companions, the Successors, and their followers were upon. So if you have reached safety in your path, do not exceed it.

There is no secret in this truth

So leave me alone from the small paths branching off from the main path

So those who indulged in hair splitting [extremism] were ruined, and no one can be ruined before Allah except one who is [totally] ruined. *Baraqish*¹⁸ [someone who does something that brings themselves harm] is guilty of sinning against herself.

In this summary, even if it is little, suffices for those who are scant with his religion and keen on it. So they do not need to prolong the article, multiply its chapters, expand the scope of its branches and principles.

Guidance comes from Allah and Allah knows best.

¹⁷ [TN] What Imam al-Shawkani said in this *Fatwa* is questionable. Rather, the correct view is that which is mentioned in the very same book *al-Uluw* of Imam Dhahabi which Imam Shawkani referred to earlier on in the *Fatwa*. The correct view is that, “The scholars of the Companions and the followers...said in the interpretation of the words...**“There is no secret conversation between three but that He is the fourth of them, nor of five but that He is the sixth of them” (58:7)**...‘His knowledge is in every place’ and no one disagreed with them on that.” *Mukhtasar Al-Uluw* by Shaykh al-Albani p. 268. Shaykh al-Albani then denounced Imam al-Shawkani for his disagreement with the *Salaf* in this regard and said, “So do not be deceived by what al-Shawkani claimed of disagreement, for every scholar slips and every horse stumbles.” Moreover in Imam Shawkani’s book of *Tafsir Fath al-Qadir* vol.5, p.166 which he authored after this *Fatwa* he states the correct view that the meaning is Allah’s knowledge is in every place.

¹⁸ [TN] *Baraqish* was a dog belonging to a pre-Islamic tribe. She heard the sound of hooves of beasts, so she barked, and the raiders were guided to the location of the tribe and they plundered it. It is a proverb used for someone who does something that brings him harm.

